

Single Mother Wins Master Farmer Award

Before Hawa Marah joined the Koinadugu Vegetable Women Farmers' Cooperative (KVVFC) in 1992, every day was a struggle. Today she is one of the most successful farmers in Koinadugu District and manages an Agricultural Business Center. At the recent District Agricultural Show Hawa won the Master Farmer Award for 2011. Hawa's ABC is among 15 such centers established by the government's Smallholder Commercialization Program (SCP) in Koinadugu district. With support from the USAID-financed PAGE program (Promoting Agriculture, Governance and the Environment) Hawa has been improving her business skills, agricultural planning, financial management and record keeping.



Hawa's farm is 3 km from Kabala Township at Senekedugu village. She grows rice, groundnuts, pigeon peas, sweet potatoes, carrots, sweet peppers, hot peppers and tomatoes. When her husband passed away and left her with two children, she didn't know how she was going to take care of her family: "My only reliable source of income was farming." She and her children made ends meet by trucking rice and vegetables for sale in provincial townships.

When KVVFC was founded, Hawa decided to become a member. She received seeds from the cooperative along with farming advice. She didn't have to worry about market access anymore, because she knew that KVVFC was going to buy her product at a fair price. "Initially, I felt isolated. My main concern was the recognition of my produce. Now I know where my produce goes and consumers know how and where to purchase it", says Hawa.

"I've been with PAGE since 2009. The first thing PAGE told me was that I should increase my production and look at farming as a business," explains Hawa, "As a consequence, my farming group was able to upgrade from a feeder group to a Cooperative, with increased levels of production and quality". In 2009 and 2010, Hawa's group supplied 2,000 50 kg bags of export quality rice to the World Food Program's Purchase for Progress (P4P) project. This rice went to feed school children in Sierra Leone.

In 2010 Hawa received two tractors from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). She has been able to send her children to school and supports some of her nieces and nephews who have been orphaned. Hawa has taken control of her life and is pleased with her success: "Being a member of KVVFC has changed my life."

KVVFC is an umbrella organization with over 800 women farmer members in Koinadugu district. It operates under a democratically governed and non-political structure, providing business services to its members while channeling their products to local and international markets. Through technical training and other forms of support, PAGE is enabling KVVFC members to improve their production and processing and to manage their farms in a commercially viable way.

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